

What's in a Name?

How did one of Duxbury's oldest roads get its name? For years, Surplus Street was simply a path known as "the road" which farmers used to get to the salt marshes. There are several theories how Surplus Street got its name, and they all lead us back to one event in American history -- The Federal Surplus Revenue Act of 1836.

But before "the road" became Surplus Street, it earned some nicknames along the way, all of which reveal a little something about Duxbury history.

While early land deeds refer to "the road", Surplus Street was at one time known by the unaccountable name of Folly Street, according to former town historian Dorothy Wentworth.

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Surplus Street was also called "Poverty Lane" by many in town since the old pathway took one directly to the poor house. "Perhaps one's folly led one over the road to the almshouse?" noted Wentworth.

Once the Almshouse was built in 1818 near where Surplus crossed over Depot Street to reach the Third Meeting House, "the road" became known as "Almshouse Road" since it brought travellers directly to the poor house. Not far from the Poor House was the town jail. (See photos). This jailhouse was later moved behind the town hall off Tremont Street.

During the 19th century, the Almshouse was an integral part of the town, with the accounts and produce from the farm regularly listed in annual reports, according to town historian Kathy Pillsbury in her book, *Duxbury, A Guide*.

While the Almshouse provided a home and work for the less fortunate in town, the nickname never stuck permanently. Neither the name Folly

Street nor Poverty Lane was ever found on any town maps or land and house deeds, noted Wentworth.

Other nicknames associated with Surplus Street included "Hell's Corner" in the late 1700s for the corner of Surplus Street and Washington Street. This name is attributed to the federal style house, 4 Surplus Street, which operated as a boarding house for shipwrights at that time.

Wives and daughters of respectable citizens wanted escorts when they walked near the Surplus Street Corner. The area became known as Sodom, or where the wicked people lived, explained Wentworth.

In the late 1800s this same Federal home became an inn called The Cottage by the Sea. It was run by a Delano and in June of 1890, the Reverend Mr. Babcock from Baltimore summered here, transforming "Hell's Corner" into "Heavens Corner, noted Margery MacMillan in her book *Stopping Places Along Duxbury Roads*.

The final answer to the origin of 360-year old Surplus Street is found during President Jackson's

administration when a federal surplus allowed Congress to enact the Surplus Revenue Act of 1836. This surplus money amounted to 36 million dollars and was to be "deposited" with the 26 states of the Union. The amount of money dispersed to each state was determined by their federal representation. It was to be paid in 1837 in four equal payments, but as Wentworth points out only three installments were actually made.

Massachusetts' share was \$1,338,173.58 and in January 1837 the legislature voted to 'deposit' the money with the towns in proportion to population, to be used for any purpose for which the towns usually spent tax money, said Wentworth.

It is believed that because Duxbury's share was used to improve Surplus Street, it was bestowed the name. Another side of the story is the residents were so intrigued by the Surplus funds, and talked so much about it, that the road got the name because it was "where those surplus people live."

Regardless of which theory you believe, what's in this name is certainly a connection to the nation's Surplus Revenue Act of 1836.

Duxbury Clipper
May 30, 2001